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110-143  
Extension Service Circular 143

December, 1930

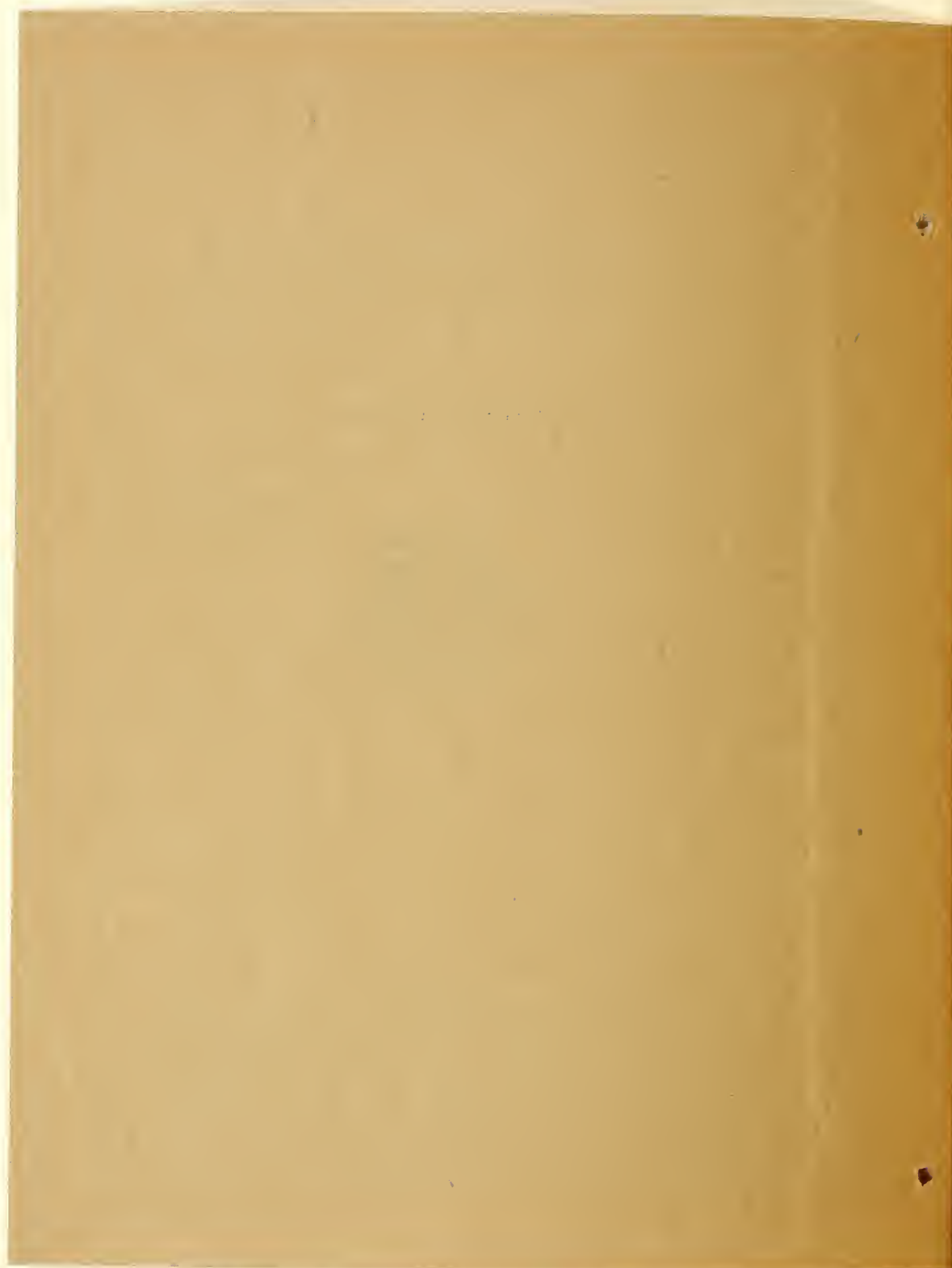
Standards of Living as a Basis  
for an Agricultural Extension Program

Madge J. Reese



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STANDARDS OF LIVING AS A BASIS FOR AN AGRICULTURAL

EXTENSION PROGRAM\*

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The economic status of the farmer holds a prominent place in business, in legislation, in educational interests, in the press, and in the forum. There is justification for this emphasis. Land ownership, tenancy, land incomes and values, land credit, taxation, tariffs, farm labor problems, unemployment as affecting business, general economic depression, reclamation, immigration, population movements, all are important considerations and have a vital influence on farm business and rural life.

No longer is the farm family satisfied when the returns of its efforts bring self-sufficiency in physical necessities and nothing more. Larger problems of farm management have arisen because of the desires cherished or demands made by the farm people themselves. The farmer coming into the realization that farming is a business enterprise and that it is a business influenced by all the intricacies of the business world, holds a most hopeful significance for America's rural development.

The farmer knows better than ever before that he must use intelligence and skill and that if he takes an unscientific attitude he can not apply available agricultural knowledge effectively. Best of all, he is coming into the realization that the mind must be prepared as well as the soil and that there is no fertilizer on earth that will make as great fertility as brains. The great Bishop Grundtvig gave good advice to the Danish people when he told them to prepare the mind and not worry too much about the economics. Glenn Frank, president of the University of Wisconsin, recently said,

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DISTRIBUTION: A copy of this circular has been sent to each extension director, State and assistant State county agent leader, State and assistant State home demonstration leader, State agricultural college library, and State experiment station library.

\*An address given before a joint session of the three subsections on agriculture at the 44th annual convention of the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, Washington, D. C., November 19, 1930.





"There are three sets of forces to consider in the development of an American rural civilization: Pre-economic forces, economic forces, and post-economic forces. The pre-economic forces have to do with the cultivation of brains; the economic forces, the conquest of bread; the post-economic forces, the capture of beauty for life of the countryside. Brains, bread, beauty, all interlock, and it can not be said that the greatest of these is \_\_\_\_\_." May I add that farming with brains, however, more certainly assures bread and beauty.

We are hearing less about the farmer's individualism. Perhaps much that has been called individualism after all has been only self-reliant qualities. Because of earlier isolated conditions and few exchanges of ideas with others, the farmer's convictions have developed deep and his viewpoints have become real philosophies to him. More and more the farmer is given the opportunity for and is taking advantage of group thinking and action. He is coming to admit that "groupism" has some advantages over individualism. Although the farmer has a long way to go in adjusting his thinking in this respect, the consideration of farm and home problems in groups as sponsored by the extension service has helped to make the farmer feel new obligations and loyalties and appreciate his new opportunities and interests. All this is hopeful. The divisions of the agricultural colleges, the resident teaching, the experiment station, and the extension service, have been largely responsible for the changing attitudes of the farmer, and when I say "farmer" I mean it collectively, the whole farm family.

The psychological approach to the farmer by the extension service on the subject of standards of living, heretofore has been more or less indirect. Now the subject is presented and discussed as such in most sections without hesitation even in times of economic depression. What do we mean by this popular phrase, "standards of living," that is being used by bankers, merchants, educators, and home makers? It is a very broad and inclusive term. For our purpose it can be said that "standards of living" means the amount of necessities, comforts, educational opportunities, and pleasures a family regards as essential to provide reasonable satisfaction and happiness in life. A desirable standard of living in material satisfaction means a comfortable home, an adequate amount of wholesome food, and suitable clothing for the family. In non-material values it means education, recreation, music, books, magazines, travel, charity, and church. It is contended by some that education is far more important than increases in money wages in raising the standard of life; that the material standard of life can never rise above the psychic standard. The activities of the extension service are based on the belief that the desire for higher standards and the earning of funds for their realization are dependent upon each other and that they must go hand in hand. The means to both these ends is education in its broadest sense and is therefore an important function of the extension service.





Rural sociologists and economists often refer to Denmark. Having visited and studied a large number of rural homes of different types in Denmark, I can heartily concur in the following statement made by Dwight Sanderson of Cornell University, "We have learned much from the Danes with regard to cooperative marketing. We could learn more from them with regard to rural standards of living, for they seem to have made steadier progress in converting income into a high standard of living than any other people, and the best students of their progress seem to agree that this has been due not merely to better agricultural technique and methods of marketing, but to education, artistic appreciation, civic ideals, and a religious conviction of the values of country life, the one making possible and stimulating the other."

If one attempted to picture the relationship of all the economic and sociological factors and influences and their intricate interrelationships to standards of living, one would become lost in a mystifying maze. I shall be content to comment upon only a very few factors and influences which the extension worker recognizes easily in his or her experience in working with rural people.

Economic questions have loomed so large in the minds of farmers that they have seemed all important. It has been many times thought that if the farmer could only settle his economic problems, if he could make more money, all the farm, home, community, and social problems would be solved as a matter of course. Enticing as this argument might seem, it does not always hold true. The threadbare and hackneyed saying, "To buy more land to raise more corn to feed more hogs to make more money to buy more land," pictures the vicious circle of thinking of many farmers in the past and has incapacitated them for associating income with home-improvement and community ideals.

Too often has it been true that the family existed for the sake of the farm rather than the farm for the family. A farmer is greatly encouraged upon receiving the commendation of his neighbors and friends when he builds a barn, buys more land, or otherwise increases his economic status. Frugality is highly commendable but when carried to extremes may be unwise economy. Expenditures for health, the correction of physical defects in young children, dental work, and education of the farm boys and girls are curtailed, community and social relationships are neglected, and home improvements are postponed from year to year. Eugene Merritt of the United States Department of Agriculture has figured that if one-half of the appreciation of land values in the past 50 years had been invested in home improvement, it would have meant \$1,000 to \$1,500 per farm or under normal conditions the equivalent of one additional room and a bathroom for every farm home.

Perhaps some of the comparisons we have been drawing between rural standards of living and those of the organized laborer have been somewhat far-fetched, but they have served a good purpose in that they have brought to the attention of rural leaders and farm people the fact that labor groups have considered the matter of higher standards of living important enough for concentrated thought and action. It must be remembered,

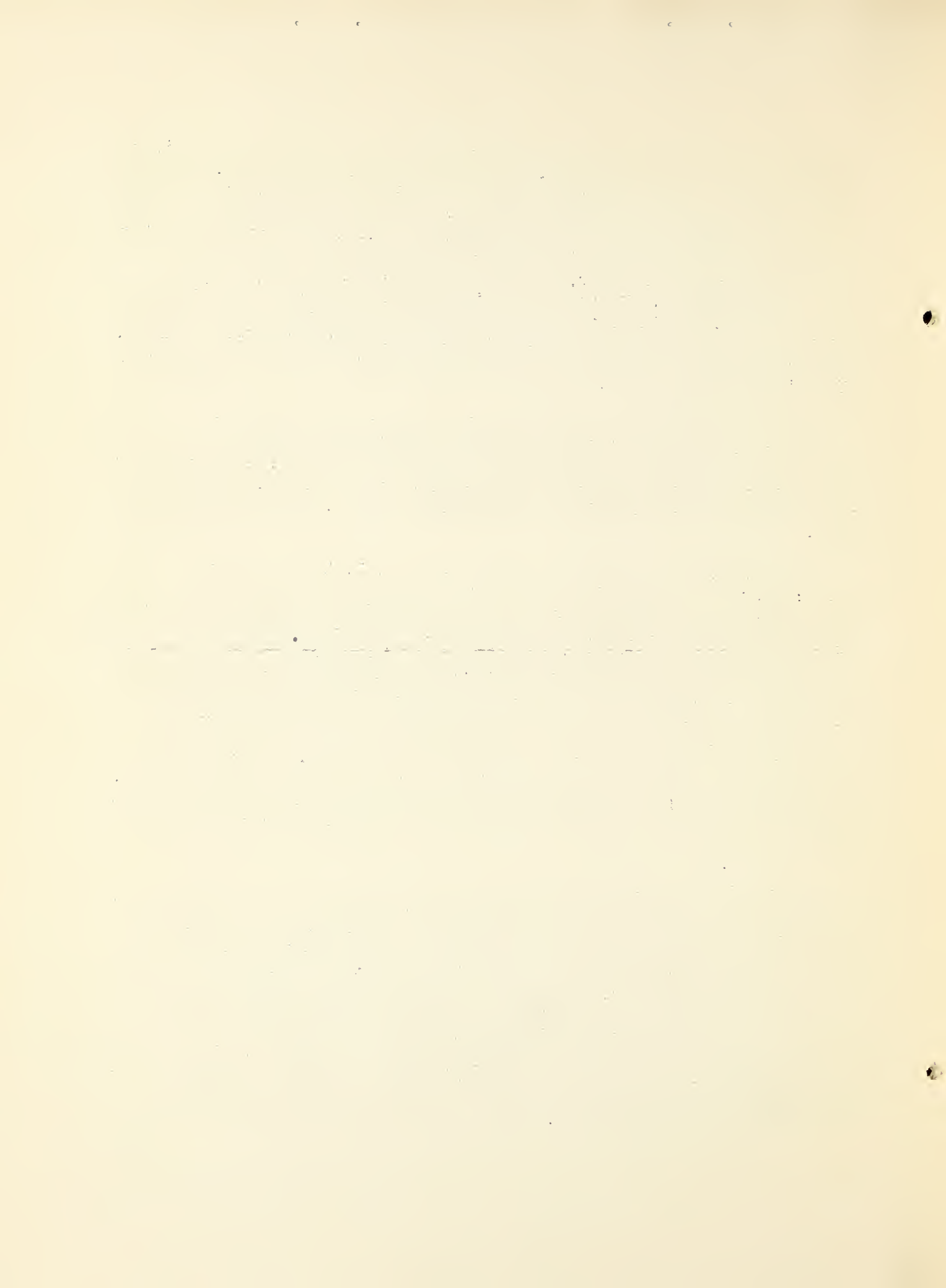


however, that the farmer is more comparable to the small-town business man than to the urban laborer. The contrasts made by John R. Commons of the University of Wisconsin are striking. Professor Commons says, "The difference between the farmer and the wage-earner may be distinguished as the difference between a wage psychology and a rent psychology \*\*\*\* The argument made by organized labor for the past 50 years has been, shorten the hours of labor, raise the standard of living, and this will force higher wages. Higher wages will compel the employer to introduce machinery and eliminate waste, and the increased ability to pay the wages will be the effect of raising the standard of living \*\*\* The wage-conscious man does not speculate on the future earning power of property. That is wage psychology."

In contrast, Professor Commons holds that when the farmer gets the benefits of higher efficiency, the better prices, the lower rates of interest, he does not often shorten the hours on the farm for himself or for members of the family; he makes little or no improvement in standards of living, and he bids up the values of land. That is rent psychology.

The following thought was advanced by M. L. Wilson of Montana in 1925: "Are we not justified in placing greater emphasis on the co-relation between the low returns for labor, especially for family labor, and the standard of living which our studies show prevail in some areas? If farmers took the attitude that they would not produce under such low wages, especially for family labor, would not production thereby be decreased and a higher price result for a smaller product more nearly balanced with market needs, thus resulting in higher standards of living? Criticism is often made of such statements on the basis of their being too theoretical, but as we progress in the study of supply and demand curves of specific commodities, such criticism becomes invalid. Such results would not appear unless farmers took a highly enlightened attitude, actuated by a militant desire for a higher standard of family life."

Can it not be further conjectured that the psychology of both the wage-conscious laborer and the rent-conscious farmer have much that is commendable, but on the other hand, that both are extreme and without balance throughout the full cycle of an enjoyable and serviceable lifetime. The laborer usually lives up to the limit of his high wages, may not always be employed, does not save money, and does not usually own a home. The farmer looks forward to his declining days of retirement on rents or savings without burden upon family or society, rather than living a full life as he works throughout the long years. Likely he is compensated and is happy in his thinking that his sons and daughters will enjoy better homes than the one he has made, and that his grandchildren will go to college.





Perhaps the most potent influence on rural life to-day and the one that will continue in an increasing degree is the spread of urban standards to the agricultural people. The automobile, followed by good roads, has extended the travel of many farm families and widened their horizons even beyond the boundaries of their native State. Localism or provincialism is decreasing in some sections. The farm family goes to town more frequently, observes the dress and manners of urban people on the streets, sees the enticing window displays, goes into urban homes, and learns how urban people live. On the other hand, the urbanite is motoring and becoming better acquainted with the countryside.

Comparisons are unavoidable and perhaps in the long run will work to a better understanding and appreciation of both rural and urban people. Unfortunately the most vital and valuable aspects of country life are not easily seen or appreciated. One must study rural life or live in the country to appreciate it fully, whereas in the city many of the advantages seem obvious. It must be recognized, however, that in material comforts, home conveniences, attractive surroundings, and social and educational opportunities, generally the larger towns and cities are in advance of rural communities.

Although the country is lacking in some features in which city people take pride and which may be desirable for everyone, the presence or absence of these facilities does not fundamentally make for the spiritual quality of life. Most enduring qualities of character and social value can be nurtured in the country without as large a number of counteracting influences, and family life can be more easily maintained.

If the powerful influence of urbanism over ruralism can always be guided to act as an incentive for better schools, better stores, churches, libraries, recreation facilities, and health-service advantages, it can not be questioned that a very superior and inviting standard of life could be developed in rural sections. The rural schools and the extension service have a big responsibility in interpreting to farm boys and girls the advantageous aspects of farming and the opportunity that farm life offers. Under some rural conditions it is not an easy matter to be convincing, but it can be safely asserted that 4-H boys' and girls' club work and the agricultural training in the schools have given many a youth a new vision of farm life and saved him for a business for which he was naturally adapted.

Investigational and research studies in relation to standards of living have been conducted largely on the basis of cost of living. Studies concerning levels of living - what amounts of goods and services rural families of various sizes use in different periods of their development; and efficiency of living - how efficient families are in buying goods and services, or in using them after the purchases are made - are practically untouched fields of investigation. The findings of such studies would be valuable both to the extension worker and the farm family. Studies of cost of production and of economics of consumption are most closely related to our subject under discussion.



During the last 10 years a number of noteworthy studies of expenditures for family living have been made in various sections of the country. C. E. Lively, of Ohio State University, in a recent review of the major findings, calls our attention to the following interesting features. The investigations made by Zimmerman in Minnesota, Anderson in North Carolina, and Lively in Ohio, show the relation of income and expenditure and indicate that although the cash expenditures for family living increase as total cash receipts increase, they increase at a much slower rate. In the Ohio study all types of expenditure increased with increasing cash receipts. Farm expense increased at approximately the same rate as receipts. Family living expenditures increased much more slowly and tended to strike a level after cash receipts reached \$5,000. On farms having cash receipts of less than \$1,000, expenditures for living equaled or exceeded receipts, and farm expense was considerably lower than expenditure for living. Investment funds or surplus were not only lacking; the farms averaged a deficit. The Minnesota study found that the surplus equaled the expenditure for family living when cash receipts reached about \$4,250.

The studies indicate that the amounts spent for food and also transportation increase as cash receipts but they increase more slowly than the total expenditure for living and become items of decreasing importance in the budget. The amounts spent for household operation, clothing, health, recreation, church, and benevolence appear to increase at about the same rate as the expenditure budget as a whole, whereas the amounts spent for furnishings, education, and organization dues increase more rapidly than the total expenditure budget and become of greater importance in the budget as cash receipts increase.

Such studies indicate that there is considerable variation in the amounts of cash which American farm families spend for living. Kirkpatrick's studies made by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture, 1922-1924, showed that 2,886 families of 11 States spent an average of \$914 per year for living, owners \$990, and renters \$758. A study by Zimmerman of 357 farm families in seven Minnesota communities, 1924-25, showed an average expenditure of \$1,025. In Ohio 176 farm family records, 1926-1928, averaged \$1,038 cash expenditure for living. In North Carolina, in 1926, 294 owner families spent an average of \$1,142, and 300 tenant families averaged \$532. In Iowa 212 farm families in 1923 averaged \$1,119 cash expenditure. Similar studies in other States might be mentioned.

The detailed specialized studies are most valuable and give us information as dependable as investigation or research methods can obtain. It will be a long time before such studies can be made in a large number of States or in individual counties. Meanwhile, extension workers need more definite information about farm home conditions and cost of living than casual and unsystematic observation can give. The method for getting the desired information has been the informal survey which is not characterized as research. Certain generalizations have been made from the data collected which have served as bases for consideration and discussion by rural groups representing a county or a district, or in a few instances a State.



1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the transparency and accountability of the organization. This section also outlines the various methods used to collect and analyze data, ensuring that the information is reliable and up-to-date.

2. The second part of the document focuses on the financial aspects of the organization. It provides a detailed overview of the budget, including the projected income and expenses for the upcoming year. This section also discusses the various financial risks and how they are being managed to ensure the organization's financial stability.

3. The third part of the document addresses the operational challenges faced by the organization. It identifies the key areas where improvements are needed and outlines the strategies being implemented to address these challenges. This section also discusses the role of the various departments in the organization and how they are working together to achieve the organization's goals.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the human resources of the organization. It provides an overview of the current staff and the various training and development programs being implemented to ensure that the staff is equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to perform their duties effectively. This section also discusses the various policies and procedures that are in place to ensure the fair and equitable treatment of all staff members.

5. The fifth part of the document discusses the legal and regulatory requirements that the organization must comply with. It provides an overview of the various laws and regulations that apply to the organization and outlines the steps being taken to ensure compliance. This section also discusses the various legal risks and how they are being managed to ensure the organization's legal compliance.

6. The sixth part of the document discusses the environmental and social responsibilities of the organization. It provides an overview of the various initiatives being implemented to reduce the organization's carbon footprint and improve its social performance. This section also discusses the various risks and opportunities associated with environmental and social factors and how they are being managed to ensure the organization's long-term sustainability.

7. The seventh part of the document discusses the overall performance of the organization. It provides an overview of the various key performance indicators (KPIs) that are being used to measure the organization's performance and outlines the steps being taken to improve performance where needed. This section also discusses the various challenges faced by the organization and how they are being managed to ensure the organization's continued success.

8. The eighth part of the document discusses the future of the organization. It provides an overview of the various strategic initiatives that are being implemented to ensure the organization's long-term success and outlines the steps being taken to address the various challenges and opportunities that the organization is facing. This section also discusses the various risks and opportunities associated with the future of the organization and how they are being managed to ensure the organization's long-term sustainability.

Farm women or men and women in county and district conferences are setting up standards in the light of their own experience and the available data. The conclusions drawn and the standards suggested are the result of discussion in the several groups considering food and nutrition, clothing, home management and equipment, and the cost of farm living. The working out of a cost-of-living budget for a family of five invokes considerable interest and discussion. The budget is based on a standard of a comfortable, healthful, and efficient living, insuring a reasonable amount of culture and education. In the 12 States or more where the county economic conferences have been held, the total required budget for family living has varied from \$1,190 to \$1,733. The criticism might arise that the setting up of such a budget, in some cases, is determining how to spend an amount of money which many farm families do not have to spend on living in that particular county. No harm comes from the question raised, as it is the farm women themselves who make up the budget. Some sociologists say one's standard of living is in one's mind. It is the conception of the way one wishes to live. One's scale of living is the way one lives, not the way one wants to live. The women are not unhappy because they can not adopt the budget immediately as their standard, but like to hold it up as a goal toward which to work and attain. One agricultural economist has suggested that a standard-of-living budget be set up in the conferences for \$800, another for \$1,200, and another for \$1,600. That would take more consideration than the limited time a 2-day conference affords.

The following farm-living budgets have been set up in the conferences as a minimum for satisfactory living standards in keeping with the general type of farming of the locality and the demands. The figures do not include the farm privileges such as house rent, and food and fuel produced on the farm.

West Virginia (State) .....	\$1,190.00
Flathead County, Mont. ....	1,200.00
Arkansas Valley, Colo. ....	1,202.00
Goshen County, Wyo. ....	1,414.73
Grays Harbor County, Wash. ....	1,464.00
Oregon (State) .....	1,508.00
Franklin County, Vt. ....	1,544.00
Brown County, S. Dak. ....	1,583.80
Salt River Valley, Ariz. ....	1,644.78
Washoe County, Nev. ....	1,700.00
Utah (average for 3 counties) .....	1,733.00

Immediately upon hearing these figures, some will say they are too high and it is placing a big order upon agriculture. Especially do these figures seem high in time of economic depression and when we consider the farm returns of 1929 and 1928 reported by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, a brief summary of which follows:



Farm returns, United States, 1928-29

Item	1929	1928
Number of reports .....	11,805	11,851
Size of farm in acres .....	270	284
Total value of farm property January 1 per farm (Farm real estate plus farm personalty) .....	\$15,242	\$15,417
Receipts less cash outlay .....	1,097	1,090
Net results per farm .....	1,298	1,334
Interest paid .....	199	202
Spent for farm improvement .....	125	126

For the 11,805 farms, the receipts less the cash outlay averaged \$1,097 in 1929 as compared with \$1,090 in 1928 and \$1,074 in 1925 for farms reporting in those years. In addition, the farm living was privileged with home-grown food products estimated at a value of \$262 in 1929. On the other hand, the total of expenses does not include any allowance for the labor of the farmer and his family, which was estimated at an average of \$772. These income figures may not represent total income, as there may be additional income derived from sources other than agricultural production.

The question may be asked: Is a range of \$1,200 to \$1,700 too high for good living standards in America's farm homes, or is an amount of \$1,000 or less too low for maintaining the standard of living the average farm family should have? There is nothing wrong with the minimum suggested budget, but certainly there is something wrong with the income.

Extension workers have learned by experience that ideals and standards can not be poured into the minds of men and women with the assurance that they will be applied effectively. Men and women live only by ideals they really understand, and carry out effectively only such plans as they have had a part in framing, hence the advantage of the conference, the demonstration, and other methods used by extension workers. I want to pay tribute to the splendid work of the home demonstration agents and the home-economics leaders and specialists. Home demonstration work has done more than can ever be measured in teaching values, how to get one's money's worth in choice of materials, in selection of ready-made garments, in buying house furnishings and equipment. It has emphasized economy in the use and care of foods and the conservation of surplus food products. It has inspired and guided thousands of farm women in making home improvements with small but wise expenditure of money and by using the time of members of the family.

We have worked somewhat on the assumption that once small improvements are made, they are so appreciated that larger amounts of money are found somewhere for more extensive improvements. Experience is to the effect that this assumption is not a false one but is not altogether





a dependable one. Is it not too much to say that the desire for home improvements alone will always stimulate the farm business to greater efficiency? Is it not more likely that farm business will respond to its responsibility if it knows what and how much is expected of it? After a minimum budget for a desirable standard of living for a given area is set up, it is only a matter of good business that the extension economists and agricultural extension agents study the farms of the area and be able to suggest an organization of the farms which will yield, within a given period of time at least, the income sufficient for the desired standard of living. This is almost the same as saying that the desired standard of living should determine the use of the land. Why not?

The "economic farm" and the "living price" for wheat will become commonly used phrases when standards of living are given first consideration in the readjustment of farm enterprises. If a farm is not of economic size for the agriculture of the particular community or is termed marginal, using "marginal" as descriptive of farms not able to furnish a reasonable standard of living, the sooner a farm family realizes that fact, the better. The extension service surely has some responsibility in this matter.

It is sound, practical, and important that objective standards of living should be associated with the present objectives of extension programs in farm management and agricultural production within a given area and type of farming. Along with increased incomes for family living, also, ways and means of enriching rural community life must be found.

In conclusion I want to emphasize the idea of a high standard of rural living as a goal for accomplishment of the united forces of the cooperative extension service in agriculture and home economics. In America we are warranted in demanding and having a higher rural standard of living than can be obtained in all the rest of the world. The genius of American institutions should be satisfied with nothing less, and agriculture should be adjusted and organized to give us the rural standard of living to which America can point with pride and which is essential in maintaining the stability of our Nation.

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